

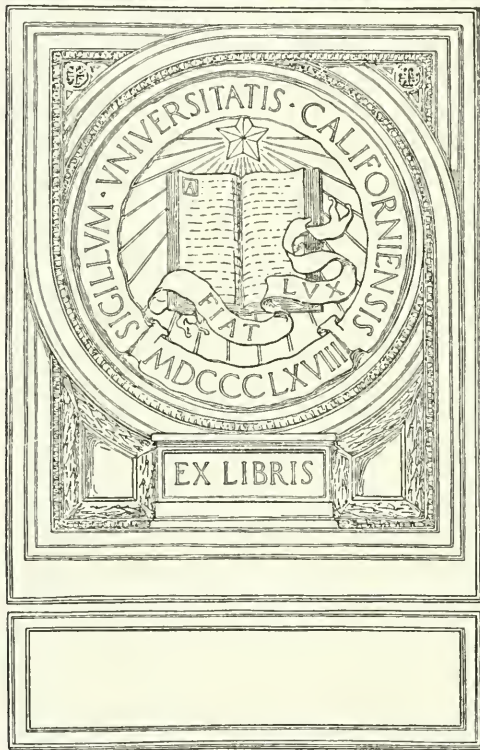
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HERA,

A POÉM.



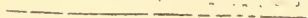
HEERA,

THE MAID OF THE DEKHAN.



A POEM,

IN FIVE CANTOS.



CALCUTTA:

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1822.

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TO

THE MOST NOBLE

THE MARCHIONESS OF HASTINGS,

COUNTESS OF LOUDOUN,

&c. &c. &c.

The following Poem

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY HER LADYSHIP'S

VERY OBEDIENT AND HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

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OCT 10 1840

Zamboni



TO THE READER.

THE following Poem, the subject of which is taken from Scott's translation of "Ferishta's History of the Dekhan," was written in the year 1817.—The circumstances related in the 1st Canto, of the War between Feroze Shaw the Sooltan of the Dekhan, and his powerful vassal Dewul Roy of Beejanuggur, which occurred about the close of our Fourteenth Century, differ very slightly from the original; and the romantic little tale of a Virgin of the Dekhan, and her subsequent fortunes, also taken from Ferishta, forms with some alteration the ground-work of these pages : but it is to be remembered, that the incidents are drawn from the writings of a Mussulmaun historian, and hence the occasional manner in which the Conquerors of the Dekhan and their acts are adverted to.

The Geography and History of India being now sufficiently familiar to the generality of readers, the Author has refrained from swelling this little Volume with any Notes of that nature : and the Indian terms made use of in the course of the Poem, being very few, no Glossary of them has been thought necessary.

CALCUTTA,
Dec. 31, 1822.



H E E R A.



CANTO FIRST.

O'ER mighty Beejanuggur's walls,
The light of morn but idly falls ;
And vainly steals to beauteous day,
The blush of yonder eastern ray :
The gold that tints each crested shrine,
With sadden'd lustre seems to shine,
Like gems upon some victim bride,
When dotage withers at her side ;
Or like that light which gilds the brow
Of Hymalaya's age-worn snow,
While all is dark and dread beneath,
A solemn, savage glen of death.
Ev'n now, from every watchtower's height,
The opening landscape woos the sight ;
And gazers thence may haply view
A scene in nature's loveliest hue ;
Yet vainly still such prospects rise,
They gladden not the mourner's eyes :

The sentry on the rampart mound,
Who slow had paced his solemn round,
And eyed the pale red herald star
Glimmer in eastern skies afar ;
Now marks with pain the morning's streak,
And shudders as he hears the shriek,
Or listens to the frantic wail,
That floats upon the rising gale.

For lo ! in Beejanuggur's streets,
Unsolaced Grief its bosom beats ;
And loathing chides th' approach of day,
Which wakens there no cheering ray.
Children arise to mourn their sire,
Borne down amid the battle's ire ;
Parents to weep their offspring's fate,
Crushed in the fight's o'erwhelming hate ;
While citizens but seek in vain
Their warrior bands, in battle slain,
And call aloud for kinsman,—friend,—
To Paynim valour doomed to bend.

And hark ! from 'midst yon palace walls,
A wilder shriek the soul appals :

Louder it echoes on the ear,
To tell of keener sorrow near.
And hear ye not the solemn dirge
Of death which holy brahmins urge,
While females' shriller cries ascend,
And screams the trembling æther rend?
And see, from yonder burnished gate,
In gloomy pomp, in saddest state,
Wind slowly forth a weeping throng,
Who bear a blood-red bier along :
And ever as they slowly file,
And near the stately funeral pile,
Still sing they:—"Woe, bold Dewul Roy!
Where is thy hope—thine only boy?"—

Mourn, Dewul Roy!—yes, mourn thy son!
His day is past,—his race is run!
Beneath the fierce assassin's hand,
Beneath the daring Moslem's brand,
He stricken fell,—a flower of spring,
That perish'd in its blossoming!
Go, childless prince, and mourn the while
Thy vassals feed the lofty pile,
And fires consume the mangled frame
Of one thou lov'dst more dear than fame.

Woe to thy heart, thou rebel Roy ;
No hour of peace shalt thou enjoy ;
The Paynim laid thine offspring low,
But 'twas thy crime that bade the blow.
Mourn on—while I the tale disclose
Of thy, and Beejanuggur's woes.

The Kistna's wave was rough and high,
And headlong streamed the current by ;
White foamed the torrent on the shore,
And far was heard the watry roar.
On northern bank bright banners wave,
With standards of Feroze the brave :
His golden crescents shine on high,
And pennons green of Islaam fly.
Many a turban'd chief is there,
Stedfast in Moslem faith and prayer,
Who leads to war his valiant band,
Burning to wield the battle-brand,
And hurl defeat on gather'd foes,
Who dared their Sooltan's power oppose.
Eager the stern Believers stood,
And chid full oft the rolling flood,
As marked they on the southern banks
The Infidels' unhallowed ranks,

And longed impatient to destroy,
The rebel hopes of Dewul Roy.

For tented on that southern shore,
Black Dewul heard the torrent's roar ;
Spread to the breeze his ensigns wide,
And marshall'd in o'erweening pride
His Hindu hosts, who hailed as foes
The hated legions of Feroze.
The Kistna saw the traitor's bands
Uplift in rage their impious hands,
With banners far unfurled to view,
And triple pennons saffron hue,
To challenge madly in the fight,
The force of each brave Islaamite.
The Rajpoot's veteran arm was there ;
The Brahmin rushed the fight to share,
Invoking Gunga's sacred flood,
And thirsting wild for Moslem blood.

Black was the hue of Dewul's brow,
But fairer than his thoughts below ;
Dark were the glances of his eye,
But brighter than his bosom's dye ;

For in that bosom dwelt a soul,
As gloomiest haunt of Ebles foul.
And yet were some, who said, I ween,
Not thus had Dewul ever been :
But he was moulded in that clime,
Where man can ripen well in crime,
Like the rank fruit its soil doth rear,
And trees scarce blossom ere they bear;
Where murderous hate can linger on
In secret till its deed be done,
And like some waters mine its way,
And but in ruin burst to day.
In earlier hour—in life's young prime—
His slumbering soul nor knew of crime :—
But soon the Moslem's power arose,
While Dewul numbered with its foes ;
And one by one his proudest fiefs
But failed—and fled his mightiest chiefs :
Then Dewul paid his tribute gold
In sullen silence ;—but 'tis told,
Ere turned he from th' unequal fight,
He paused—to curse the Islaamite !
A curse with some is idle breath,
In sterner minds it clings to death :

And his was venom of the breast,
Which rankles deepest when repress;
Not the quick flame of sudden ire,
Consuming till itself expire.
He cursed Feroze—enough that curse;
Long years might sanction—not reverse.
From that fell hour his soul would brood
On vengeance, till it seem'd as food;
And dark became his deeds, and then
He fled from fellowship with men.
And one lone virtue linger'd near,
Like meteor in the midnight air;
Or graven word of Alla beaming,
On Moslem's blade from battle streaming:
For it was said he loved his son;
Yet oft that love so strangely shone,
The youth in terror shunned his sire,
And shrunk from ever wakeful ire!—

Unlike his sire that hapless youth,
For he was meek—of gentlest truth;
And dear to him the joyous hour,
When in the veil'd Zenanah's bower
He careless hailed the fleeting day,
Far from his parent's ken away.

The tented field—the warrior's rage—
Were sad to him, in tender age:
Far sweeter, 'neath some shelt'ring tree,
To hear the lute's soft minstrelsy;
Or breathe aloud some legend's theme,
Of love and lover's fitful dream.
Yet fame would tell, in feat and game,
The conquering wreath he oft could claim:
And though, unwarmed by manhood's fire,
He sought not battles like his sire;
Yet some, who mark'd the brighten'd eye,
That glow'd at proffered injury,
Would whispering say, "The gentle boy
Was brave—aye brave as Dewul Roy."

But now the Hindu's feast is come,
And loudly sounds the d'hol and drum.
Throughout black Dewul's festive camp,
They nightly hail by glowing lamp,
At hour of eve and midnight watch,
Carousal gay, and song and nautch.
Each wearied chief who late had heard
His vassal's sullen, muttered word,
As mourned they oft their fettered might,
And sighed to cross and dare the fight;

Like the loosed falcon freed awhile
To soar, ere speeds the busier toil,
Now gladly could resign his care,
The mimic war, the mirth to share;
Or smiled to list the shout and song,
That pealed the joyous scene along.

Sternly aloof, fierce Dewul Roy
Deigns not to share his people's joy:
But bids his youthful son partake
The scene of mirth, and nightly wake.
Now canvas walls are poised around,
And gaudiest carpets deck the ground;
The shaumeeana raised on high,
Seems in its breadth another sky:
A silver canopy is spread,
In splendour o'er the prince's head;
Chiefs, nobles, rajahs, circling stand
With spearsmen, guards—a gallant band;
And countless lamps, in bright array,
Rival the blaze of noon-tide day.
Strikes up the lively mundul's sound,
The syren dancer looks around:
She veils her dark voluptuous eye,
Where thousand ambushed beauties lie;

Seems now as dreading to advance,
And coyly shrinks from every glance,
Like the young fawn that trembling flees,
At whisperings of the very breeze;
Till gathering like th' enchantress snake,
Whose lightning glance illumines the brake,
She lifts an eye of liquid fire,
To bid the boldest gaze retire.

But soft begins that damsel's song,
And hang upon her words the throng;
Her strains would seem each heart to move,
For hush! she breathes a lay of love,
And hymns that soul-seducing power
Which steals o'er youth's too yielding hour!
She paints the soft delirious thrill,
The thoughts that lovers' fancy fill;
Now breathes, in varied, changeful strain,
The tale of slighted passion's pain,
And tells the ever maddening sigh
Of torment-wreaking jealousy.—
But hark—she whispers now the charm,
When hope first stills the soul's alarm;
Till in her lay's more joyous scope,
As fairer dawns that rising hope,

She swells her song to blissful theme
Of lover's wild tumultuous dream;—
And only pauses to express
The murmured sighs of happiness,
When first his beating breast may bear
The form which trembling nestles there!

The lay had ceased—the song had done;—
Tears dimmed the eye of Dewul's son.
The nobles marked, and beckoned nigh,
Two players skilled in mimicry;
And bade them ape, in antic dance,
The Dervis rapt in frenzied trance.
Approach'd they, glancing from the eye,
A look of feign'd insanity;
And quick they muttered holy spell,
Such as the Moslem faith betell;
Then timing with their prayer's low sound,
Featly they paced it round and round,
Till madder rolled their fearful glance,
And wilder, quicker whirled the dance!
Convulsions tore each frantic frame,
And loud they shrieked great Alla's name;
Nor paused they,—each his khunjur drew,
Around his head the weapon threw,

And seemed amid such frantic rage,
With fiend or demon fight to wage.
The prince and courtiers wondering gaze,
And loudly sound the mimics' praise:
Yet know they not the wretches' guile,
Nor dream they of a foeman's wile;—
For in that mad convulsive dance,
Swift as the light the twain advance,
And with a sudden furious lunge,
Their weapons in the prince they plunge.

“ Ho! treachery!—ho!—foul murder!—death!”
Shouted the crowd's accordant breath:—
Their cries were lost, for from without
Pealed now a louder, fiercer shout;
Screams filled the camp—“ Hence—hence—Oh fly—
“ Feroze's murderous hosts are nigh!”
Ev'n at the word upon the shore,
The Sooltan's thronging legions pour:
For dread Feroze had sent his spies,
In secret plot and deep disguise;
He bade them seek the prince's tent,
On daring deed of terror bent;
There mid the Hindus' festive joy,
Poignard the child of Dewul Roy;

While he, to seize that fateful hour,
Invoking loud the Prophet's power,
Bade many a hasty raft prepare,
The foaming Kistna's tide to dare.

Awful that scene's confusion dire,
Terrific raged the Paynim's ire;
And oft the tulwar drank, and deep;
And thousands sank to endless sleep.
Throughout the troubled Hindu bands,
But few could seize the scattered brands;
Yet here and there, around some tent,
Resistance vain its fury spent;
And some would bravely fight and stand,
Obedient to a chief's command;
And yet they checked the work of death
One moment—one vain pause's breath,—
No more,—for onward rushing still,
Like some tornado's whelming ill,
The havoc rolled its sanguine flood,
Till Kistna's wave ran red with blood!—

Upon the camp's remotest flank,
Stayed by the Roy, a desperate rank
Of worsted Rajpoots turn once more,
And list the battle's distant roar.

Silent they stand—"Oh, where my boy?"
Bursts in sad accents from the Roy.—
None say,—for who shall dare relate
To *him* the murdered prince's fate?
"Where, where my son?" he louder cries—
An awful pause—no soul replies.
"Say, wretches, 'mid your dastard flight,
"Saw none the rajah in the fight?—
"Oh, holy Brahma—save my son!"
He cried, and wild his visage shone,
As hurrying to the tents again
He breathless led his rallied train.

The Moslems meet him—but they face,
The flower of Dewul's warrior race:
And though their crescents wave on high,
In token of glad victory;
Tho' flushed with late success they stand,
Soon falter they before the band
Of Dewul's vassals, as amain,
They rush the Rajah's tents to gain.
"Twas dire the charge; the deathly shock
Description's boldest power would mock.
The fire from mingling tulwars flash,
And studded shield and corslet clash.

Some scarce may wield th' uplifted brand,
So closely wedged the warriors stand:
'Twas then the shorter dagger's steel
Made many a heart the death-blow feel ;
And many a true Believer's soul,
Drinking in death the martyr's bowl,
By Infidels' fierce khunjur driven,
Sped to its Houri's arms in heavea !

Stern Dewul now had reached the tent,
Nor long his anxious glances bent ;
For Oh ! embathed in murder's hue,
'The corse appalled a parent's view !
Revenge ! the gasping Roy had cried—
Had not his lip the sound denied.
He would have rushed the foes to meet,
But palsied were his powerless feet ;
Till groaning, darkly glancing round
He sunk in horror to the ground—
And crawled to clasp in blind embrace
The lifeless relic of his race.

“ Arise, O Roy ! ”——he cannot hear.—
How dread his maniac looks appear !—

Oh! there were mercy in some blow,
To break that torturing trance of woe;
Yea—there were kindness in the deed,
To bid that bursting bosom bleed:—
It must not be—nor yet the day,
His soul shall quit its mortal clay,
To tremble at stern Yama's seat,
And know the doom that soul shall meet;—
Dungeoned within some reptile frame,
So foul, it were unclean to name.—
Lo—vassals seize the senseless Roy,
While some upbear the bleeding boy;
And forming round a desperate throng,
Firm from the tent they speed along.
Vainly the legions of Feroze,
In hosts their gallant steps oppose;
In vain strives shield with clanging shield,
To Rajpoots' might must Moslems yield:
Their course was as the whirlwind's rush,
'Twas like the mountain torrent's gush,
That plunging o'er some steep profound,
Bursts—bears away each rock and mound,
And headlong in resistless force,
Sweeps maddening to the plain its course.

“ Haste—bid my Moghul veterans brave
“ On yonder rafts the Kistna’s wave!”—
The Sooltan cried.—Each loosening raft,
Hastes o’er the stream a steed to waft.
Already mounted on the strand,
The curb is loose in horseman’s hand;
As lightning through the camp he scours,
And like its bolt the vengeance pours:
But all in vain;—tho’ stragglers feel
The edge of Ispahan’s red steel;
Though, writhing with their wounds, around,
Some fated victims strew the ground;
Yet, well the Moghuls’ pride may swear,
That life was never held so dear.
Oft had they fought with bold Pytaun,
And warred with Western Mussulmaun;
In Delhi’s troubled plains had been,
Fell actors mid the fiercest scene;—
Yet vainly to the charge they rush,
Repulse now bids each effort blush.

The shades of night had shrunk away,
Before the early eastern ray;
The sun in seeming splendour rose,
But soon, at strife of deadly foes,

'Tis said, a dye of deepest red,
Portentous o'er his visage spread :
And legends tell, that on that day
No eye beheld the sullen ray ;
That many a dense and gloomy cloud,
Rolled o'er his disk a death-like shroud ;
And when at eve he sunk again
Beneath the far—far western main,
Blood-like an orb descending shewed ;
And o'er each plain and height was strewed,
And in the wide expanse of sky,
A spreading veil of fearful dye,—
As if the day's last setting beam
Mirrored the battle's sanguine stream.

Another night—and breathe awhile
The Rajpoots from their gallant toil ;
For foes around have ceas'd the war,
Nor Beejanagur's walls are far.
Tho' broken now that band's array,—
Yet well they bore the Prince away,
And every toilsome danger braved,
Till Dewul from the fight they saved.
Again they file in gloomy state,
To gain the city's outward gate ;

But Oh! how changed from that proud host,
Which first upreared rebellious boast;
How few—the rescued few that come,
To speak their bleeding comrades' doom;
Or live to tell the hapless fight—
The terrors of that festive night!

Not yet had Dewul raised his eye;
He spake no word, nor breath'd a sigh;
Murmur'd his lip no whispering moan,
Nor gave he yet one feeble groan.
'Twould seem he did not feel, nor know
His blighted hopes—his son laid low.—
Not feel!—each pang, each rankling sting,
That sickening sorrow's hour may wring;
Each agonizing throb of pain,
That ever beat in breast or brain;
Were ease—were bliss—if but compared,
To those the anguished Dewul shared.
True, on his wan and livid brow,
Sat but one settled look of woe;
And like some idol's rayless eye,
His glared as on vacuity:
Yet—could you view his inward breast,
'Twas there the torture spurned at rest,

There every fibre racked, until,
Outwearied by the whelming ill,
It sank :—and then his haggard frame,
Like victim's long impaled, became
Half torpid:—at each fearful throe
It *felt*—but ceased to writhe in woe.

They placed him in his palace bower,
And watched him through each weary hour.
His nobles, who escaped the fight,
And fled the slaughter of that night,
Ruled for the Roy his wide domain,
And saw him brooding o'er his pain.
But when Feroze's hosts appeared,
And round the walls his armies neared,
Submission made they—abject, low—
To escape the Moslem's menaced blow.
Compassion touched the Sooltan's breast,
He bade his kindled anger rest ;
And deigned to take each proffered gift
Of elephant and courser swift ;
While many a lovely virgin, riven
From dearest ties and home, was given
To swell the haram of his train,
And quit for e'er her native plain.

Perhaps to waste life's springtide year
In prison'd pomp and captive's fear ;
Perhaps to sigh at faded beam,
Of youthful love's too cherish'd dream;
And, loathing on a conqueror's bed,
Weep her fond hopes, all wither'd—fled.



HEERA.



CANTO SECOND.



H E E R A.

CANTO SECOND.

THRICE gleaming o'er the city spires,
The sultry sun had shed his fires ;
Thrice purpling o'er the ruddy west,
His setting hour had sunk in rest ;
Since, proud in spoil, the great Feroze,
Turned from the walls of vanquished foes,
And homeward sought, in triumph glad,
The splendours of Ferozabad.
And ere again arose to sight
That sun on Beejanuggur's height,
An ancient Hindu hailed his ray,
As beamed the bright approach of day.—
Amid the troubled tide of war
Slow had he journied from afar,
And grateful to his aged eyes
The kindred city's walls arise.
O'erjoyed he sought the shelving side
Of holy Toongabuddra's tide ;

There, mid the morn's yet early hour,
His murmured orison to pour.
The river gained, he bent his breast,
And cast aside his pilgrim vest;
His trembling hands on high he spread,
And joined above his aged head;—
Then utter'd quick each holy name,
That Brahma's attributes proclaim;
And offering made to hail his power,
Of sprinkled wave and herb and flower.
He stained his breast, and wrinkled front,
With mystic signs to Brahmans went;
This done, the round of worship o'er,
Resumed his vest, and left the shore.

Totter'd his limbs beneath their load,
As trod he now the neighbouring road:
His bending form, his step of age,
His guise of saintly pilgrimage,
His humble looks and gesture slow,
With blest zénour and painted brow,
Bespeak him of that holy race,
The elect of Brahma's favoring grace.
He sought no food, save root and herb;
Nor wilful durst his hand disturb,

At direst peril of his soul,
The life of insect, beast, or fowl:—
His lips must utter ceaseless prayer,
His limbs each morn ablution bear;
And holy fast he must observe,
Nor once from Veda's tenets swerve:
Or when his life-departing breath,
Shall sigh its last in hour of death,
His soul unclean must still remain
In earthly tenement of pain;
To breathe perchance in fouler breast
Of lowly caste,—or pant, unblest
In reptile form, mid filth and slime,
That Brahmans e'en to touch were crime.

His steps had sought each holy shrine,
By superstition deemed divine;
Whether he climbed the dizzy ghaut,
'Mid cavern'd wolds with terror fraught;
Or weary toil'd his noontide way,
O'er plain unsheltered from the ray.—
And he could boast of penance toil,
From Lunka, and Raunessur's isle,
To Nasuck's stream, or Dwarka's fane,
Where Krishna held his hallowed reign;

Or dread Hinglatz,—or distant far,
The snow-girt wave of Munserwar.
Full oft in pilgrim guise he sought,
And bowed at fane of Juggernaut:
Or Kassee's ever holy shrines,
Where Brahman lore in pride reclines.
And he had measured Ganges' course,
From Ocean to its snowy source ;
Where first from Hymalaya's side,
Apart the sister Rivers glide,—
So fable tells—around the base,
Divided in their infant race.
One stealing to the broad champaign,
Greeting the soil of Hind's wide plain,
There heaves its worshipped wave along,
'Mid homage of the Hindu throng:
The other, far in eastern course,
Sweeps o'er the Lama's clime its force ;
Nor seeks again the sister wave,
Till nigh old Ocean's billows rave,—
Then, as if seized with coward fear,
Nearer it comes, and still more near ;
Till mingling with the Ganges' wave,
Both rush, a rolling sea, to brave
The terrors of the Ocean's roar,
In surge, and surf, and foaming b'hore.

But though in seeming saintly guise,
The Brahman claimed each honored prize,
Yet worth with him is outward still,
Nor goodly thoughts his bosom fill ;
His utmost faith, his proudest care,
The pilgrim's toil—the muttered prayer.
His cheek was furrowed,—Yet each line
To keener eye shewed dark design :
And soft the accents of his tongue,
Where strains of virtue ever hung ;—
But all was art ;—each honied word
Stabbed like the night assassin's sword,
When neighbour's weal, or foeman's fame,
Stood in the path of Soopol's aim.
Yet many a soul his worth believed,
And still were better hearts deceived ;
For he was skill'd in Sunskreet lore,
And read the shasters o'er and o'er :—
At midnight's still and solemn time,
He watched the stars in heavenly clime ;—
Until 'twas rumoured he could state,
What changes worldly tides await ;—
Could say, when demon shades would come,
To plunge the mid-day orb in gloom ;

Or veil the moon's yet lovelier face,
And cast their image o'er her grace,
Till, scared by pealing shout and call,
Flees from her disk the fiendish pall.
Thus skilled—thus false—thus famed of men,
Was he who sought the city then—
And blessed the gates that rose before,
To tell his toil and travel o'er.

Proudly the ramparts rose to view,
As onward still the Brahman drew:
When lo ! by yonder temple's site,
He eyed the work of solemn rite ;
And hail'd amid its groves a crowd,
Whose loud acclaims were echoing loud.
It was a Suttee's pomp he saw,
Revealed in all its harrowing awe ;
When widowed youth, in funeral blaze,
Ends with her lord her fated days.
The ready pile was towering high,
The lighted torch was flaming nigh ;
Slowly the thronged procession filed,
The trumpet's note was harsh and wild ;
And barbarous Hindus deemed such hour,
A triumph of their Brahma's power ;—

Nay, thought that heaven would bless the pyre!—
When perished in that murderous fire,
A victim lovely soft and young
As ever raptured poet sung.—
And heaves that victim's breast no sigh
As stalks the fell procession by;
And on that pale, yet beauteous face,
No sign of sorrow can they trace:
No fond regret, nor trembling fear;
Doth nought of inward dread appear?
Each Brahman's pride would answer, Nay—
But pity weeps and falters, Yea.
Oh, who could read that woman's heart,
Nor own its bitter anguished part?
She dies with him she never loved,
She bursts the ties her heart approved;
She leaves—ah, leaves a chosen Youth,
Whose vows she heard—believed his truth;
And dies—too conscious that the death
Which steals in flames her latest breath,
Shall sting the widowed lover's breast
With throe for ever—spurning rest.

And hard his heart who can relate,
Nor sigh at hapless Maya's fate:

Her parent held the post divine,
Of priest at Seva's awful shrine ;
Where oft, in gentle spring of years,
Arrayed in loveliest maiden fears,
His daughter offering-flowrets brought,
To pilgrims who that temple sought ;
And scarcely rose her bosom's swell
The riper hour of love to tell,
Ere owned that breast an inmate dear,
And she had lent affection's ear
To softest, sweetest tales from one,
In whom fond youthful passion shone—
But—fled this dream of bliss away,
And dark was soon sad Maya's day ;
For trembling to the temple came,
An aged chief, of withered frame,
Whose boundless votive gifts of wealth,
Proclaimed his sigh for peace and health:
He Maya saw, as from her bower,
She coyly culled each mystic flower ;
And fired was then his feverish breast,
Nor knew the hoary lover rest,
Till, from her heartless parent gained,
The maid in loathed embrace he strained.

Not long the aged chief could prove,
How poor the hour of dotard love :
For ranked among the rebel foes,
Who braved the vengeance of Feroze,
He left his young and lovely bride,
To seek afar the battle's tide.
Amid the fight, an unseen hand
Struck to the bridegroom's heart a brand,
And hurled him headlong to the ground :
But as he fell,—appalling sound !
A savage, phrensy-breathing laugh,
Pealed on his ear in bitter scoff :
It told him 'twas no battle foe,
That gave the overwhelming blow—
He shuddered at th' assassin's yell,
And knew his youthful rival well !
His followers raised their bleeding lord,
And bore him thence :—he spake no word,
But lingering lay—till o'er his cheek,
Came death in wan and livid streak ;
And ere had ceased the vital tide,
He motioned that his lovely bride
Should seek with him the funeral pyre,
And o'er his murder'd corse expire.

She heard her doom—Her lover came
In deep disguise—in guilt, and shame ;
And own'd 'twas his the vengeful blow,
That laid the dotard Rajah low.
But shrunk she from his red embrace,
And hid from murderer's view her face ;
And spurn'd—aye spurn'd—the proffered flight,
Tho' lone the hour, and dark the night.
Yet, when her fancy drew his heart,
Writhing in future ceaseless smart ;
And when she sighed, and sighing thought,
For her the daring crime was wrought ;
Oh, then she softened, sobbed, and wept,
And stubborn unforgiveness slept :—
She sunk into her lover's arms,
And let him wildly clasp her charms ;
Till, every other feeling dead,
That moment had she with him fled :
But—by the lamp's uncertain light,
His blood-stained poignard glanced to sight ;
She saw—unconscious swelled her shriek,—
Her handmaids rushed her couch to seek ;
And holy Brahmans gathered there,
To sooth her last sad hours in prayer.

All speeding came.—The stranger fled,
Despairing—phrensied—worse than dead;
Slunk to bewail in distant clime,
His fatal love—the fruitless crime;
And rankling in his bosom bear,
The hell of ever stinging care!

Now are the final rites begun,
For gleams on high the eastern sun;
The singhas' sounds are now more loud,
More wild the shout of frantic crowd.
Pale Maya from her bosom draws,
Her richer veil of silver'd gauze;
And gives to loved companions near,
The flowrets, once in childhood dear.
She lifts one parting glance,—her eye
Rests on the temple towering by—
It was the scene of youthful hour,
Where fled life's spring in joyous bower;
Where every moment seemed to move,
On blythest wing of joy and love—
She turns away—that deep—deep sigh
Betrays her bosom's agony!—
And now she nears the awful pile,
Yet strives to force one parting smile,

Or breathe one faint endearing sound
To weeping relatives around.—
In vain!—Upon her trembling knee,
They place a load she dare not see ;
It is her murdered husband's head,
Cold—ghastly—wan—its colour fled :
And, see the friends, the priests, retire—
They raise the torch—the pile they fire !
Desist!—desist!—such harrowing scene
Thrills to the heart in horror keen ;
Description fails—racked vision flies,
O God!—the victim shrieks—she dies !

Hushed were the shouts the crowd among,
And slow dispersed the gazing throng ;
Now levelled lay the pile's tall frame,
And died to nought the smoke and flame ;
Save where th' uncertain eddying gust
Wafted around the spark and dust ;
Or when some gently passing air
Just fanned the expiring ember's glare,
And raised a momentary ray,
That fitful gleamed, to die away.
Old Soopol left the fatal pyre,
And turned his course to city spire ;

Moving in saintly Brahman's pride,
To gain the neighbouring rampart's side.
His callous heart had felt no throe
Of pity, at the Suttee's woe ;
Too oft his eye such rite had seen,
To moisten at that barbarous scene.
But now some Brahmans gather near,
And ask the stranger, " Wherefore here ?"
He straight replies, " I leave your foes,
" I fly the realm of proud Feroze ;
" And brethren—this my blest employ,
" To seek the presence of your Roy.
" The Kistna saw me since the fight ;—
" Foul triumph of the Paynim might !
" And there I learned of Dewul's child,
" In foemen's fatal toils beguiled :
" But tidings now I haste to bring,
" Shall bid our holiest temples ring,
" With glory still to Dewul's cause,
" And honor to our Brahma's laws !
" Betell me, brethren, how my feet
" May gain your Dewul's sad retreat ;
" That I may pour upon his ear,
" A tale his childless hour to cheer."

“ Brother, thou mayst admission claim,
“ If such, indeed, thy welcome aim ;
“ And may thy saviour steps be come,
“ To soothe our weeping city’s doom!—
“ But Dewul mourns in secret bower,
“ Nor wields as wont his sovereign power.
“ Yet rumour tells, that at our prayer,
“ He deigns th’ approaching feast to share ;
“ And like yon sun which poured again
“ His gathered glory to the plain,
“ As marked ye late, he prouder broke
“ From ’midst the Suttee’s air-wreath’d smoke ;
“ E’en thus our Roy shall grace his throne,
“ The passing gloom of sorrow gone.
“ Till then, oh, Bhae ! thy steps incline,
“ To sojourn at our holy shrine ;
“ Partake with us our guileless fare,
“ Our sacrifice and lowly prayer.”
Meekly the Brahman bowed his head,
And with his friendly brethren sped :
He tarried and partook each rite—
He cursed with them the Islaamite—
And spoke of Brahma’s precepts, taught
At holy fane of Juggernaut.

He told them of each distant scene,
Where erst his wandering steps had been ;
And boasted he of dangers past,
Of self-inflicted pain and fast :—
Yet—still returned he vague reply,
And framed his speech right cunningly,
If ere their questions haply turn,
His purpose with the Roy to learn :
It was, he said, of import great,
Nor could his lip the tale relate,
Nor dare to ear of mortal own,
Save only at the prince's throne.

The feast was o'er, and circling slow,
In measured pomp of eastern show,
The nobles, rajahs, guards surround
The Roy, in wonted splendour crowned.
But mute they stand,—for still his brow,
O'ercast, bespeaks his inward woe.
Lo ! trembling, slowly drawing near,
In abject guise of doubt and fear,
A bending form obeisance paid,
And wonted lowly offering made.
Scarce deigned the sullen Roy to eye,
Th' approach of pale humility :—

It was the Brahman in that hour,
Who trembled at the monarch's lower;
And falter'd,—“ Death to Dewul's foes!
“ Revenge, revenge, on proud Feroze!”

Started the Roy:—the courtiers round
Felt in their breasts the life-blood bound.
The Brahman's curse had touched a string,
That Dewul's inmost soul could wring;
It wakened all his bosom's hell,—
Each feeling he would fain dispel.
“ Ha! seize that wretch who durst recal
“ The memory of my offspring's fall!—
“ Who art thou, slave! whose idle word,
“ Hath reached me like the Moslem's sword?”—
“ Thou dotard!—could thy utterance breathe
“ Curses like ills, my hate would wreath,
“ To overwhelm the murderer of my child;
“ Is it by this my wrongs are wiled?—
“ Nay—rather let my bosom share,
“ Oblivion's dream of black despair;
“ Beat with a cold insensate throb,
“ To wake no sigh, nor living sob;
“ Till with a wild avenging burst,
“ My soul may rise, to hail the worst,

“ Or lavish on my fallen foe
“ Its sum of hate,—its woe for woe!
“ Then *could* I think—nay rack this brain,
“ How best prolong my victim’s pain;
“ Poignard his offspring one by one,
“ And when the parent writhed alone,
“ Oh—I could mark his gleamless eye,
“ His anguished bosom’s agony—
“ His quivering lips essay a prayer,
“ In mercy one short pang to spare;
“ While glorying, as these pangs I view,
“ I’d answer by some torment new;
“ And ever—ever still deny,
“ The blow that deals eternity!
“ Say, slave! can *this* thy curses give?
“ If such thy power—then curse and live:—
“ Reveal each hour my childless doom,
“ That I may pant for bliss to come!”

The rajah paused—but such the fire
Of fiendish and unearthly ire
Still flashing from his kindled eye,
That horror seized the courtiers by!
The tyrant’s burst of hate—so dread—
The cause, that hallowed once, seemed fled;

The very murder of his son,
Their wrongs—defeat,—all, all were gone;
And nobler bosoms quailed in fear
At form of withering Vengeance there !
Ev'n Soopol shuddered at the view,
And oft his searching glance withdrew :
For ne'er, on life's frequented path,
Had witnessed he such demon wrath.
He speechless stood,—but soon again
His tongue pursued its purposed strain ;
And thus his words :—“ O valiant Roy,
“ Thy slave's poor curse can ill destroy
“ The mighty spoiler of our land,
“ Who lifts on high his sovereign hand—
“ And lo ! the gather'd ruin lowers,
“ O'er Beejanuggur's hundred towers !—
“ But, Prince ! I can a tale unfold,
“ To rouse thy soul to vengeance bold ;
“ And make the hated tyrant feel
“ More torture ev'n than could thy steel !”

Stern Dewul heard, and waved assent,
Then sat in mute attention bent,—
The late wild passion of his breast,
Like the calmed deep, had sunk to rest :

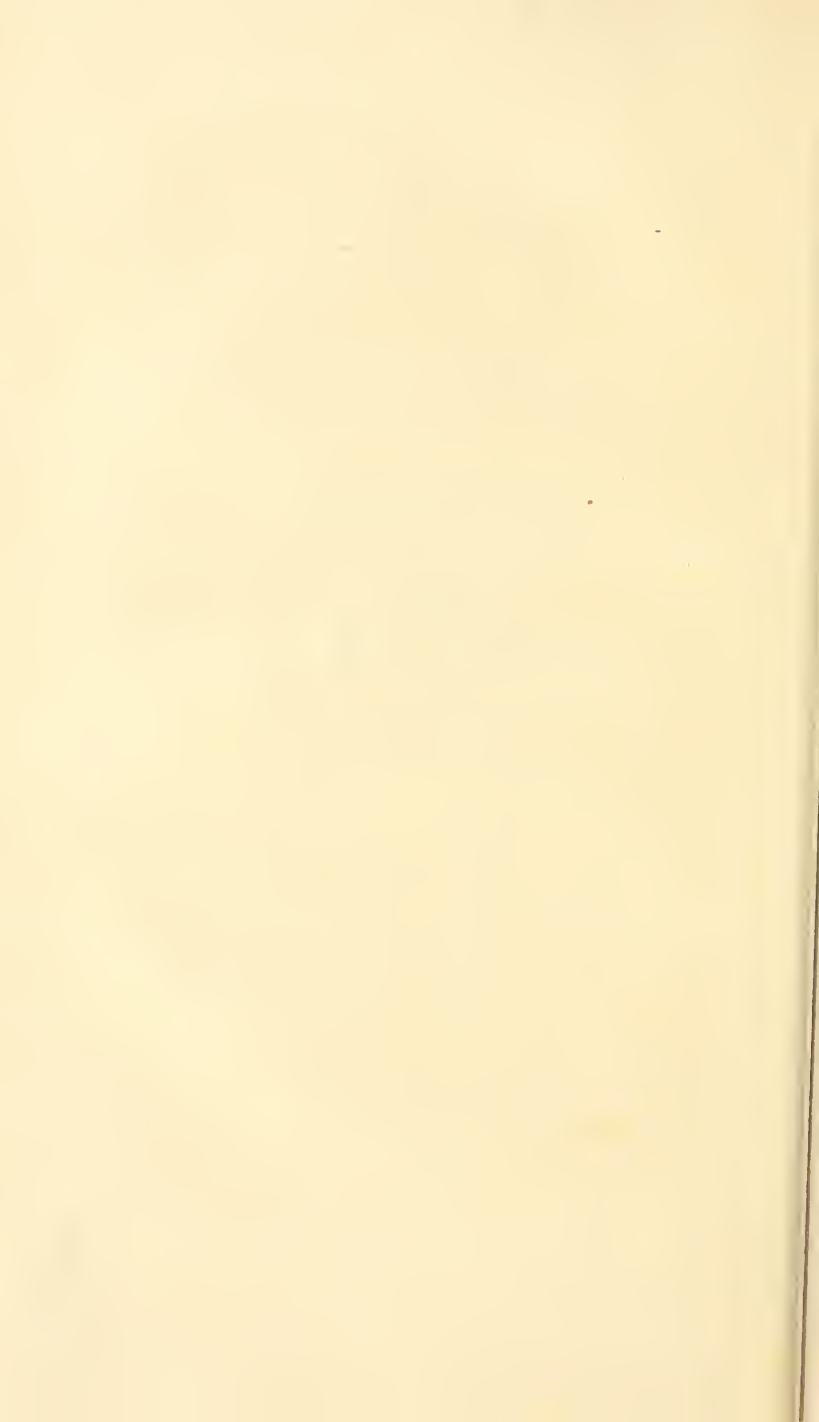
Or like the ocean-spout on high,
Which rears its column to the sky;
'Till startled nature shrinks beneath
The o'erpent charge of wreck and death :—
But lo ! the rushing waters pour,
The loosened torrents whelming roar ;
And wasted o'er the troubled tide,
The havoc, din, and wrath subside !



MEERA.



CANTO THIRD.



H E E R A.

CANTO THIRD.

THE BRAHMAN'S TALE.

FOUR circling years their suns have shed,
Their every varying season fled :
As oft along her sacred shore
Hath Kistna seen her torrent pour,
And menace from her trembling mound,
To overwhelm the late parched scene around ;
As oft, receding from the brink,
Hath Kistna seen her waters sink,
And glide again in lowly bed,
Till islet sand upreared its head ;—
Since I, a pilgrim, wandered forth,
To bow at shrines of distant north.
And I these shrines remote had sought,
In humblest penitential thought ;
For well I knew that mortal life,
The prey of woe, and guilt, and strife,

Is ever stained with foulest sin ;
And he who Brahma's love would win,
Must cleanse his heart at holy fane,
Tho' toils his way 'mid grief and pain.
I, fearless, passed each mountain ghaut,
And weary travel held at nought,
Till, gained at length the Ganges' side,
Upon my vision burst the pride
Of Kasee, as she towered on high,
In all her sacred majesty.
Tall o'er the deep calm wave she stood,
Her domes dark frowning on the flood ;
While oft some temple's airy brow,
Reflected in the stream below,
Gave added grandeur to the scene,
Yet lent her pomp a lighter mien.
Assembled myriads on the shore
Their vows to Brahma murmured o'er,
As proudly o'er the hallowed tide
A thousand barks were seen to glide ;
And far as gazing eye could reach,
Palace and fane o'erhung the beach.

My Teerut'h o'er, I bless'd the day
When homeward turned my gladdened way ;

And far from each late worshipped fane
I sought in peace my native plain.
For though, alas ! the Moslem wields
His empire o'er my fated fields;
Yet—dear the promised sight of home,
To eyes that ev'n have wept to roam.
The hour was hot—the sun was high
In bright meridian summer sky,
As rising on the prospect glad,
I viewed afar Ferozeabad;
But distant still its turrets seem,
And cloudless fell the o'erpowering beam.
Sinking beneath its sultry heat,
I turned to seek some cool retreat,
To rest my frame, till evening hour
Should tempt me from the friendly bower:—
But weak my steps,—in age and toil,
They faltered o'er the burning soil,—
And ere the wished-for grove could gain,
Senseless I swooned upon the plain.

Bending in lovely angel form,
Such as the Moslem's visions warm
Can give his fabled paradise,
A virgin met mine opening eyes.

My wilder'd glances wondering rove,
I find myself in thickest grove,
And think it still some dream of night,
That conjures shadows to the sight;
For never—never yet on earth,
Had fancy given such beauty birth.
O Prince ! my withered breast is old ;
There beats within a tenant cold ;
I deemed that bosom's feeling past,
I thought it chill'd as northern blast :—
Oh, 'tis not thus—for still I gazed,
And still my wistful look upraised
In adoration to the maid,—
As if my prayers to heav'n were paid !
The ringlets on her white brow wreathing,
Were trembling in the wind's soft breathing ;
As if to chide the playful air,
That fanned them from the beauty there :—
And she was yet a child—so young,
That scarce twelve summers had her tongue
Been taught to murmur Brahma's name,
From loveliest lips His power could frame.

“ Poor aged pilgrim,” sighed the child,
“ Thy looks are pale—those glances wild :

“ My cries had warned yon travellers twain ;
“ They raised thee from the burning plain,
“ And bore thee senseless to the shade,
“ And here their aged burthen laid.
“ I anxious watched—you woke not soon—
“ How long and fearful was the swoon !
“ But pilgrim rest—here rest this day,
“ Nor tempt again yon sultry way.”

I grateful rose—she led my feet,
Thro’ paths close sheltered from the heat ;
And gained we soon her parent’s home,
That towered amid the leafy gloom ;
In shaded pomp of olden time,
And fashion of our hallowed clime,
Ere yet the Paynim’s daring hand,
Had spoiled our lost—too lovely land.—
In its zenanah’s deep recess,
She sought her aged sire’s caress ;
And whispered, that from garden bower,
Where strayed her steps in sultry hour,
She marked a form of age and pain,
Faint, weary, sinking to the plain ;
And she had lured the pilgrim here,
To taste in peace their proffered cheer.

Rajah, I will not waste thine hour,
'Mid duller scenes of peaceful bower :
Enough, that years I tarried there,
To me assigned the pleasing care,
The youth and opening mind to frame
Of Heera—such that maiden's name.
Her parent, one of warrior-birth,
A Rajpoot—famed for mightiest worth,
In early youth had left his land,
To meet afar the Moslem's brand :
Now aged, rich in battles' spoil,
He sought unmarked his native soil ;
Where turretted in pomp arose,
The upstart city of Feroze ;
And lived in wealth his arm had won,
To dream of deeds in battle done.
His child, his age's chiefest care,
Beamed on his view like being fair,
That Brahma in his mercy sent ;—
A thing so pure,—so innocent,—
And oh, so mingled with each thought,
Each vision his affection wrought,
She seemed a portion of his soul,
Released ere life had reached its goal,

To fill its destined form of light,
And bless pre-doomed his living sight.

Thrice summer waned—yet Heera grew
Fairer as still the seasons flew.
And sparkled, blythsome, in her eye,
The careless smile of infancy;
Nor then her breast had learned to share,
Those thoughts, that in a form so fair,
In heart so soft, must soon be known,
As childhood's lighter hours are flown.
But soon were moments, I could see,
When Heera lull'd her wonted glee;
When, rapt in thought, or listless mood,
She sought the calm of solitude:
And I have followed, and unseen,
Amid the depth of foliage screen,
Have marked her rising bosom beat,
In impulse of emotion sweet,
That seemed to say, her fancy gave
A visioned being, fair and brave,
With whom to rove in some new scene
Of seraph joy, and endless green!

Yes, well these silent signs could prove,
That Heera's heart was formed for love.
The wild bird warbling on the bough,—
The flowret sweet, scarce seen below ;—
The stilly hour, when evening breeze
Slept sighless in the shadowy trees ;
And, through some neighbouring forests glade,
The broad red moon her blush betrayed,
As rising on the starry sky,
She led her lovely course on high ;
And grew more pallid, but more bright,
As spread the solemn hues of night :—
All this could Heera's feelings warm,
And win her soul to mystic charm ;
Till sighs alone might dare reveal
The thoughts she felt, nor blush'd to feel.

Beside their home's secluded tower,
Bloomed wild a citron's fragrant bower ;
And deep within its lonely shade
Loved to recline the gentle maid :—
There wake her lute's soft dulcet note,
Till seemed on trembling air to float
The breathing strains of heavenly lay,
Such as voluptuous Moslems say

Come stealing from their heaven above,
To lure the parting soul to love.—
It chanced—I know not how, in sooth—
These strains were heard by stranger youth;
For soon some bold unhallowed feet
Had daring sought our lone retreat;
And Heera found beside her bower,
A half blown rose,—love's message flower;—
And blushed its hue, to think what youth
Could venture thus to plight his truth.

And yet, I ween, she kept that flower,
Prized it each long, each lonely hour:
She viewed its leaflets withering die,
As fled the fading moments by;
And cherish'd well the idle theme
Of joy, and faith, and lover's dream!
Her fancy raised a phantom youth,
In all the glowing guise of truth;
In every fairer hue of worth,
That maiden fond can picture forth:
Such as the virgin can impart
To first loved inmate of her heart;
When young romantic visions blind
The wakening feelings of the mind;

And all her bosom owes the power,
Of early love's too witching hour.—
She little thought, the flowret's leaf
Brought, as it died, a tale of grief;
And told, that like the gathered rose,
Love for a moment sweetly shows—
It blooms, and dies :—while hopes so blest,
That blossomed gaily o'er the breast,
Soon one by one flit far away;
As on the sapless stem decay,
And fall the parting leaves around,
All withering, scattered to the ground!

One morn the clang of horse's hoof,
Loud echoed round our ancient roof;
And broke upon the damsel's ear,
As in the grove she wandered near.
She fearful turned,—but fled in vain,
Nor yet the haram wall could gain,
Ere dashed a youthful horseman by,
And Heera met that stranger's eye.
Costly and rich his steed's array,
And crimson were the housings gay;
And splendid shone the rider's dress,
Such as would Omra's rank express.—

He turned, and with a sudden bound,
Featly he lighted on the ground;
And slow, in courteous grace advanced,
As on the maid his dark eye glanced.

A robe of gauze her form arrayed—
The graceful veil of eastern maid;
But half concealed each feature's charm,
And faintly hid her soft alarm:
But when at length, she raised askance
A timid look, a stealing glance—
Swift from the youth's glad piercing eye,
There seemed a messenger to fly,
That spoke to Heera's bosom more,
Than countless tales of love could pour.
It told her—whose the message flower,
That shed its fragrance on her bower;
While crimsoned deep the conscious flush
On Heera's cheek, in softest blush;
And trembling, faltering, fled her feet,
Far to the haram's still retreat.

I saw the youthful stranger's brow,
Mantle awhile with deeper glow;

His black eye beamed a look of fire,
His joyous crest rose bolder,—higher :
One wistful parting-glance he flung,
As swiftly on his steed he sprung ;
Already could the courser feel,
The urging of the horseman's heel,—
Already bounding o'er the plain,
The city spires he seemed to gain ;
Till lost upon the fading view,
My wondering glance I slow withdrew,
Deep pondering who that stranger bold,
Who thus his hateful purpose told ;
Nor feared to taint, with Paynim eye,
The very haram's purity.

Some passing moons unheeded flew,
Nor of that stranger aught I knew.
When,—woe the night !—I restless lay,
And longed for the approach of day.
Sudden I hear at midnight hour,
Soft whispering sounds in Heera's bower.
The Bulbul's nightly song is done,
The moon's mild light is sunk and gone ;
But fair along the middle heaven,
The pallid circling zone is driven.

Now all is hushed;—but hark, again,
'Tis sure the sigh of Lovers twain,
In converse sweet.—'Tis Heera there—
But who shall thus these moments share;
Or fearless tempt the haram's shade,
To seek the love of Hindu maid?

'Twas he—'twas he—that stranger youth—
My fears were just—'twas he, in sooth:—
Vile Moslem wretch!--in hour of night,
I knew him by his turban's height,
As on its crescent seemed to play,
A transient gleam from starry ray.
Secret I glided to the grove,
To blast the vile intruder's love;
And as the daring youth retired,
I seized his robe, by anger fired;
I seized, and shouted loud for aid,
And strove to snatch the stranger's blade.—
“Desist, rash fool!—thine hand unclasp!”
He cried.—“Unloose such idle grasp,
“Or dread mine arm!”—The dastard boy—
May withering blight that arm destroy!—
Struck me,—aye, struck me to the ground,
And fled my grasp with instant bound.

But oh ! may every baneful ill
Deep in his Paynim bosom thrill ;—
May Kallee's worst relentless hate,
For ever on the wretch await,
Who, humbling low a Brahman's worth,
Could strike,—and spurn him to the earth.

Yes---yes, the Moslem wretch may dare,
Unhallowed slave, his arm uprear
Against a Brahman's sacred form,
And mock awhile the gathering storm ;—
But if on earth revenge be near,
That wretch shall retribution fear !—
Rajah, methinks, the tale were long,
To tell of black, tumultuous throng
O thoughts, fierce boiling in the breast,—
Of anger's sleepless scorpion pest :
Suffice, at once, to say—I bowed
At Kallee's shrine, and fervent vowed,
To wage interminable hate,
Till death should seal its victim's fate !

Her parent, whom my shout had called,
Came breathless, at the cries appalled.
But low I hid my burning face,
Nor deigned to own my foul disgrace

To mortal ear.—I taunting said,
“ Go, seek thy Heera, spotless maid!—
“ Go, seize her midnight paramour.”
Then rose.—My pride would deign no more;
I fled the grove, yet reckless where,
The slave of daily hate and care,
Till—blessed my search—I met the form,
Of him who waked my bosom’s storm.
I saw him, big in pomp and pride,
With guards and horsemen by his side;
And deep the throng that round him prest,
Or this poor arm had reached his breast.
O Roy! to know that Moslem’s name,
Thy joyous soul will burst to flame,
But, ’tis not meet that every ear,
The youth’s proud parentage should hear;
Or what the spell, like meteor star,
Revealed amid the gloom afar,
Can guide me on to purpose blest,
To give thy wrongs revenge and rest.

The Brahman paused:—stern Dewul’s eye,
Glanced on the guards and nobles by:—
They marked that glance; and slow withdrew,
With meet salam, the courtier crew.

Yet deemed it strange—and wondered they,
That Dewul sat to list that day,
An idle tale of maiden love,
And Lovers' hour, in distant grove.
But yet had Dewul little heard,
The Brahman's tale and well-conned word.
He sat abstracted, as a man,
Who seems awhile dark thoughts to scan;
Or, ever and anon, his eye
Would change to glare of apathy,
'Mid pause of feeling undefined,
That morbid slumber of the mind;
And leaden torpor of the brain,
Such as succeeds the first wild pain,
From venom'd fang ; the torture fled,—
Yet throbs the wound, benumbed and dead.

The wary guardsmen, ranged without,
Gave many a wondering look of doubt.
Sounds reached the ear ;—then sudden pause ;—
Nor guessed their minds the fearful cause.
What passed within no soul could tell ;
But soon there pealed a sudden swell
Of wild delight, of boisterous joy,
In loudest accents from the Roy.

As listeners heard his converse high,
In flow of curbless extacy,
Full well they guessed, the Brahman told
Some secret tale of import bold;
That like the living spark applied,
The matchlock's teeming womb beside,
Can give the sleeping mischief birth,
'Till kindled, sweeps the ruin forth.

Hark! from the Prince a loud command
Summons the Leader of his band.
The Roy is now in close divan,
Secret and deadly plot to scan,
Its purpose known to few.—That night,
When rose the moon o'er tower and height,
The sentry at the barrier's side,
Saw, from the city-portal, glide
A silent host of horsemen bold,
Who northward seemed their course to hold;
While footmen speeding with the throng
A curtained litter bore along.
No tenant filled that litter then,
Nor could the silent warder ken,
Why moved the band so secret by,
In guise of purposed mystery.

But ere the morrow's sultry hour
Had drunk the dew from herb and flower,
Full many a Cassid and Vakeel,
Pressed on his courser's side the heel;
And urged his way o'er hill and plain,
To summon Chiefs from each domain,
Who round old Beejanuggur's tower,
Bowed to the holy Brahma's power.

And Dewul's woe of heart was gone,
Nor wailed he now his murdered son :
Upon his brow there sat a smile,
Presaging more than mortal wile ;
And those who knew these symptoms well,
In clustering groups their thoughts would tell ;
And whisper,—that his dagger's hilt,
Seemed ready grasped in dream of guilt !
Yet who had marked such scowling eye,
Nor weened that foal revenge was nigh ?
Or who had seen his clenching hand,
Wielding in murderous thought a brand—
His quivering lip—his gnashing teeth,—
His sword scarce slumbering in the sheath,—
And not have known, the Roy decreed
A more than common foe to bleed ?

Nor sat he now in haram shade
'Mid gloom of sorrow's wan parade;
But busy, on the ramparts all,
He strengthened well each mouldering wall,
And Beejanuggur heard once more
Rebellion's taunt in hapless hour.



HERA.



CANTO FOURTH.



H E E R A.



CANTO FOURTH.

IT was that hour of Eastern clime,
When Nature wakes each thought sublime ;
When, softly veiled in starry dress
Of night's majestic loveliness,
She spreads along the deep blue sky,
Her half-illumed obscurity:
And scatters, 'mid her groves below,
Her insect swarm of meteor glow ;
Revealing from each bough at night
A thousand winged gems of light !
The sultry winds had died away,
As fled the parting gleam of day ;
And breath of gentlest zephyrs came,
In whispering sighs to fan the frame.
It was that hour when on some tree,
The Bulbul poured its melody,
And trilled a sweet and artless strain,—
A seeming lay of inward pain,

As if it sang the joyless fate
Of widowed love, and absent mate :—
Or, in a fretful, wilder theme,
Chided the night-orb's silver beam,
That ever with the breeze's play,
Flung thro' its bower intrusive ray.
The hour was come,—when in the grove,
A thousand wafted odours rove ;
When, hid from view, the virgin rose
Her softest sweets around her throws ;
And blushes at the love-fraught sigh
Of zephyrs, as they wanton by ;—
Yet freshens, in that evening scene,
Where she may shrink, and blush unseen.

In solemn, shadowy grandeur clad,
The turrets of Ferczeabad,—
The recent pride of Moslem reign,—
Rise dimly o'er the distant plain.
Now golden spire, and ponderous dome,
Alike are veiled amid the gloom ;
Save where, upon some tall minar,
The rising moon-beam gleams afar,
Or yon pale crescent, glistening bright,
Reflects a mimic silvery light.

In such a scene, and soothing hour,
Advancing from yon latticed bower,
An angel form hath sought the grove,
Slow stealing on the step of love.
But hark—she startles,—as the sound
Of distant nobut peals around ;
And wonders whence such triumph comes :—
For tho' she hears the festive drums,
Yet darkness o'er each turret falls,
And shrouded lie the viewless walls.

But swells more loud the nobut now,
In peal of deep continuous flow.
It tells of glorious battle won,
It tells of deed of valour done ;
While spreads around exulting joy
In triumph o'er the vanquished Roy.
Gleams now the lamp, and glaring torch,
O'er each minar and musjid's porch ;
For they, who late on Kistna's side,
Had foiled the mighty Dewul's pride,
Were now returned to native plain
To boast their haughty foemen slain.
But lo !—again the shouts are o'er,
The nobut's peal is heard no more :

Nor loud acclaim disturbs the air,—
For,—hush,—it is the hour of prayer!
Silenced are now the festal crew,
And hasten the Believers true
To gain the mosque, in pious crowd,
And wake their “ Bismillahs ” aloud.

And who in yonder grove had been,
And marvelled at the triumph’s scene?
Had marked the flaming torches light,
Till seemed to flee the shades of night;
Till, rising to the distant eye,
Burst into view each turret high,
And bright was spire, and mosque, and dome,
Late lost amid the fallen gloom?—
And who had hearkened to the cries,
And shouts, that echoed to the skies?
Had listened to the trembling gale,
That bore the peals from hill to vale?
Who, now, had marked that triumph cease,
Till all was hushed in prayer and peace?

Fair—fair—the maid who saw that scene,
And stood afar,—like angel mien

Of Houri, as it waits to sooth,
Some soul in Irem's bower of youth!
Oh, she was fair, as softly fair
As those light clouds which float in air,—
Ere, blushing o'er the eastern sky,
The first young tints of morning lie,
And yet the paler orb of night
Can tinge with purest, loveliest light!
The dark braid parted on her brow,
Gave fairness e'en a brighter glow:
While faintly blushed her virgin cheek;—
But, Hafiz! e'en thy lay were weak,
To hymn the bud-like, coral lip,
Where Love might heavenly rapture sip,
For ever breathe in bliss the soul,
And quaff the martyred Paynim's bowl!—

Oft from her large and brilliant eye,
A thousand fancies seemed to fly;
Oft on her features danced a smile,
Blooming in every playful wile,
Till laughing graces mantled gay,
In woman's witching—own array!
Yet then, ev'n then, a thought could steal
Upon her soul, and bid it feel

Some all resistless mystic glow,
To check her spirits' wilder flow.
Then her bright glance was chastened o'er,
Veiled then her eye-lash more and more ;
Those orbs of love—which late so bright
Had shone, as noon-tide stream of light,—
Were now more like the lotus flower,
When summer dew has gemmed it o'er,
To veil each brighter tint from view,
Yet shrine it still in lovelier hue.
In hour like this, when feelings stole,
When sighs revealed her secret soul,
Celestial then each feature grew,
Till all evinced emotion new :—
Ah, what that soft emotion told,
Dull icy hearts can ne'er unfold ;
It pictured not of grovelling earth,
'Twas love—'twas heaven that gave it birth.

Love—thou sweet phantom of the breast,
Thou dream by wayward fancy blest,
Thou vision in the hour of youth,
When swells the heart with hope and truth ;—
There breathes a magic in thy name,
To fan the lowly Bard to flame.—

He joys of virgin hour to speak,
To paint the hue of vermil cheek ;
To hymn the sigh that stolen breathes,
The flowery chain that beauty wreathes :
Yes—such is still the favorite theme
To lyre of Bard, in minstrel dream !
Yet,—woe the hapless youth who dare,
Such raptured strain too frequent share ;
For soon his softer heart, betrayed,
Becomes the prey of heartless maid ;
Who lists his lay with seeming smile,
While lurks a bitter, secret wile,—
To leave her victim vision-led,
Till, waked to truth—his peace is fled !

But why does Heera turn around,
As listening breathless to some sound ?
Why beats her bosom wildly now ?
Why burns her cheek in warmer glow ?
Fond girl—no footsteps reach the ear,
Thy hope was vain—no soul was near.
But quick is love—hark, hark again !
Echoes a tread on distant plain ;
Nearer,—still nearer,—scarce aloof,
Peals the glad sound of horse's hoof :—

How quick is love!—no rustling wind
Wafts disappointment to the mind;
But swifter than the torrent's tide,
A youth has gained his Heera's side:
Already, clasped to lover's breast,
The panting, blushing maid is blest.

There is one joy on earth below,
Which Heaven in mercy can bestow;—
A lone Acacia in its bloom,
Where life's long deserts stretch their gloom.—
And there are moments of the heart,
So pure, of man they bear no part;
But free the soul from earthly tye,
To meteor flight of extacy,
Till mind,—thought,—feeling,—all are driven,
Far on the seraph wings of heaven!
Would duller hearts that bliss enquire?
Let the young lover seize his lyre—
Go—bid him sing of woman's charms,
Of maid, first clasped in circling arms;
While thoughts of meaner passions' sway,
Fly from the beating breast away,
And all is love—love, pure as wild;
The blushing rose, of thorn beguiled!—

Too blest—it lives not,—but the beam
Can linger hallowing, when the dream
Is past :—still, like the flower, it lies
All withered—and no sweetness dies !

Yes, such the joy that beauty gave,
When pressed to soul of AHMED brave.
And such the feelings thrilling then,
In him the happiest far of men.
Yet, worthy was that fond embrace
To clasp each softer maiden grace ;
And well the youth who revelled there,
Such hour of raptured bliss might share :
His bold heart beat in noblest form,
His dark eye as his bosom warm ;
His deed in war like lion's wrath,
Yet lure his step to peaceful path.
Oh, then a more than mildness seemed,—
A ray of warmest feeling beamed
From glistening eyes of love and light,
Mild as the dew-gem—yet as bright.

His Sire, the first of chieftains famed,
Feroze's kindly love had claimed,

For gallant aid, on field of fight,
And many a war-won honor bright.
At frontier, and beside the throne,
That sire's devoted faith had shone ;
Till now his brand could proudly wave,
Omra—of twice three thousand brave.—
Such was the tale of Ahmed's tongue,
When Heera fondly listening hung,
And questioned she her lover's life,
So young—yet trained to warrior strife.
She listened oft to glowing tale
Of battle's tide, when hosts assail ;
And wondered still the enquiring maid,
That one so fond, could bare his blade ;
Or turn with proud confess'd delight,
To fearful scene of mingling fight.
And oft the maiden deemed it strange,
That 'mid their hour's endearing range ;
Her Ahmed late ne'er told of home,
But loved to other themes to roam ;
While there were symptoms of constraint,
And mystery, that no words could paint ;
A nameless semblance of disguise,—
Yet seen too well by lover's eyes, —

That came to wring the maiden's heart,
And waken there unwelcome smart.
And she would mourn in lonely strain,
And weep at self-inflicted pain,
That lured by love, and stranger's worth,
She wronged her Sire, her very birth ;
And smiled upon a Paynim's worth,
Whose very faith was vile on earth ;
Nay—dread to think—by Brahma driven,
An outcast from eternal heaven !—
But, hush ! what steals upon the gale ?
What gently whispering strains prevail ?
'Tis Heera now a descant pours,
More soft than breeze from Irem's bowers !—
Those artless notes that maidens breathe,—
When simplest strains their magic wreath
Around our hearts—we know not why,
Yet bless the murmured witchery.—

SONG.

Alas, the haram's depths are sad,
Its lonely walls in sorrow clad ;
Each latticed height is dark and drear,
In vain the mundul woos the ear ;

For She, the haram's pride and care,
Hath wrought a secret sorrow there.

Not long the day, her slaves could tell,
When playful like her own gazelle ;
And Oh—with eyes as laughing bright,
That beamed their fulness of delight ;—
And now,—the haram's pride and care
Is prey to secret sorrow there.

She may not say—Oh, fear would seal
The tale her restless sighs reveal ;—
And wherefore tell—she only knows,
That far is fled her wont repose ;
And She, the haram's pride and care,
Is lost in secret sorrow there !

She ceased.—'Twas sad that gentle strain
And breathed in tone of artless pain ;
It called a tear to Ahmed's eye,
When whispered soft the maiden's sigh ;
For woe the lover's heart who sees,
A heaving bosom, ill at ease,
Yet knows the pangs that riot there,
He may not soothe,—can only share.—
“ Dispel those thoughts ; ”—he fondly cried,
“ Can truth and sorrow live allied ?

- “ Or am I then unmeet to win
“ Thy love—and deemed as one of sin ?
“ What tho’ our Faiths may hostile prove,
“ Our hearts more pure but meet in love ;
“ Like summer clouds of form uneven,
“ That float, apart, o’er face of heaven,
“ Yet mingle, ere the hour of night,
“ In one pure softened sky of light !
“ Thy parent,—true,—I own him wronged,—
“ This poor concealment—still—prolonged.
“ And Soopol !—But the wretch is gone,
“ And thus thy every care be flown :—
“ Can thought of him afflict thy breast ?—
“ Ah, why at guilty flight deprest ?—
“ My Heera,—hadst thou marked the glance,
“ That scowled, in fellest look, askance,
“ When, late in yonder city’s street,
“ His haggard eye I chanced to meet—
“ Thou wouldst not weep his absence more,
“ Nor let thy heart a fiend deplore.
“ ’Tis true, I grieved his age to harm—
“ Unmeet that age should dread my arm !
“ Nay, when he strove my steps to stay,
“ And prone I struck him from my way,

“ My only fears were, Love ! for thee ;
 “ I trembled, lest some slave should see
 “ Thy stol’n retreat to Haram shade,
 “ And blast the fame of spotless maid !”

“ Ah, tell not, Ahmed, of that night ;
 “ Its memory comes my heart to blight.
 “ Alas ! ’twas then my parent came,
 “ And anger fired his aged frame ;
 “ He questioned me of paramour,
 “ Of secret love, in midnight hour :
 “ Ahmed,—that parent I deceived ;
 “ A vile untruth this heart conceived ;
 “ For thee, the falsest tale I told,
 “ And bribed my silent slaves with gold,—
 “ Till—shame!—he caught me to his breast—
 “ My burning cheek with kisses prest :
 “ Nay, craved forgiveness for a thought,
 “ With foul, unkind suspicion fraught.
 “ Is there a pang no power can heal?—
 “ ’Tis that the writhing heart must feel,
 “ When comes affection’s purer sweet,
 “ To bless—yet undeserved, unmeet,
 “ And purchased but by poor deceit.— }

“ Oh Ahmed ! wouldst thou gain my prayer,
“ And this fond bosom truly share,
“ Go, cease to lure this guilty ear,—
“ Nor give my heart to ceaseless fear.”

But lovers' words are honied o'er,
And better far than sage's lore ;
Dispel the doubts, and sooth the mind
Of maiden, in her fondness blind.--
Ere Ahmed on his courser sprung,
And heard “ Adieu” from faltering tongue,—
Ere Heera's timid lip retired,
It breathed each vow the youth inspired ;
Still promised never to disclose
To mortal ear her bosom's throes ;
Still to regret,—in secret sigh,—
And weep the fault she could not fly.

And he is gone.—She looks around,
And trembles at each whispering sound.
His last words linger on her ear,
And memory breathes—“ Farewell, nor fear. ”
Her fancy still that warning gives ;
In seeming voice the murmur lives :—

But ah, the import is not there,
Her mind but feels the echo, "Fear!"
And at that lone—deserted hour,
What throng of guilty terrors pour;—
Her parent's ire,—her injured home,—
The crime, from Brahma's paths to roam;
And link her maiden love with one,
Whom it were sin to look upon!—
She shuddering wept!—Lo—fancy came
To soothe, and urge her Ahmed's claim:
Once more it hark'd his lover-vow,
Dearer than wealth or worlds below:
Again it met the beaming eye,
That sought her own so tenderly;
That lingering looked,—as if to say
'Twere death to tear the gaze away:—
And still she wept;—but grief was gone;—
And love triumphant reigned alone!—

Thus time had fled, till one fell day,
Retired portentous of dismay!
The western sky was veiled with red,
Afar the deepening hues o'erspread;
A pierceless shroud of gloom, around
The heavy darkening welkin frowned!

Till o'er the west uprose the form,—
The massy front of gathering storm.
No breath disturbed the sultry air,
Nor yet was seen the lightning's glare;
And all was wildly hushed as death;
Save screams, from distant swamp or heath,
Of feather'd habitants, whose fear
Urged their shrill cries to listening ear.—
How dread the gloom!—but hark that roar!
Slowly the tempests onward pour;
And see—the forked lightning's flash,—
While peals the thunder's deafening crash;
And meteor-gleam, that darts in air,
Flings o'er yon columned dust its glare,
Till a red wall of earth-raised clouds,
Advancing, half the concave shrouds!—
Ulla!—the wildly rushing blast,
Pours its full burst of rage!—'tis past—
And lo!—in instant ruin laid,
Uprifted woods, and mantling shade!
Sweep now the mingling hail and rain,
In sheety deluge, o'er the plain;
The clouds, in awful conflict driven,
Rush o'er the face of angry heaven:

And Ah!—that red bolt's shaft of fire
The reedy forest kindles dire,
And gives to view, 'mid fearful light,
The scene of ruin, wreck, and blight!

Now sinks the boisterous night to peace:
The thunders lull,—the wild winds cease:
Faintly the glimmering lightnings play,
The clouds far eastward flit away;
Or borne on wing of gentler gale,
Lightly along the æther sail.
Now twinkling stars unfold to sight;
The pale moon beams her placid light;
And save, where prostrate on the ground,
The riven trees are scattered round;
Or yonder forest's dying flame
The lightning's scathing power proclaim;
So still, so soft the stirless scene,
'Twere vain to guess the storm had been!

Amid that calm and silent hour,
Slow stealing from the Haram bower,
Lo! trembling hands the wicket move;
And footsteps softly seek the grove.

'Tis Heera!—Why thus venture there?
No lover shall these moments share.—
But see,—how wistfully she glides,
While seeming fear her purpose guides:
For scarce the gale's dread blast was o'er,
Or thunders lulled their pealing roar,
Ere Heera to her lattice hied,
And thence with breathless terror eyed,
Amid the bright and vivid glare
Of meteor, streaming thro' the air,
A horseman, who in silence led
A steed along, with cautious tread.
Love said, " 'twas Ahmed's noble form
" Unsheltered, 'mid the blasting storm!"
She paused—and shuddered: yet,—no more
The gale's appalling furies pour:
And tremblingly she sought the grove,
The truth of each fond fear to prove.

Ah, sad the hour that led her feet
Beyond the Haram's safe retreat;
For sudden seized by ruffian's arm,
Swelled her loud shriek, in wild alarm.
She felt a savage, sinewy grasp
Her beating bosom rudely clasp;

While strange—hoarse voices struck the ear,
From ambushed band in covert near.
“ To horse,—to horse,—the maid we have ;—
“ Quick search the grove for Moslem slave.
“ Or seize—or slay,” a ruffian cries :—
“ ’Tis vain !”—an aged voice replies.—
’Twas Soopol :—“ Haste—to horse—away !
“ Or lose we else our virgin prey ;
“ Trust me, the wretch would little dare,
“ Fond tho’ he be, such night to share :
“ And curses on his coward heart,
“ That fails our bold emprise in part.”—
Quick starting from the thicket near,
Full twice ten hateful forms appear ;
Full twice ten Rajpoots marshal round ;—
As many clam’rous voices sound,
“ Ho ! bring the litter :”—quick ’tis brought ;
And rudely is the maid up-caught,
And forced within the palanquin,
’Mid anguished shrieks of terror keen !

Where is the arm of Ahmed now,
To snatch the maid from dastard foe ?
Where is the brand that well could brave,
Ten thousand deaths that maid to save ?—

Alas ! beneath his palace roof,
He rests in reckless peace aloof,
Nor dreams that foes with Heera fly,
To seal his doom of misery.

Quick crowd the ravishers along,
While round the litter horsemen throng ;
Now raise they Soopol on his steed,
And to the plain direct their speed ;
Chiding the footmen's slow array,
And urging oft their tardy way.
The captive's shrieks are hushed and gone,
Her thoughts are fled in death-like swoon—
Ah—why not death?—'twere well for thee,
Lost maid, could life for ever flee!
For speeds thine hour, to prisoned doom,
To haughty Dewul's haram gloom ;
To suffer taunt and sorrow there,
Perchance—his hated couch to share !

But hark ! what shouts from distant rear
Inspire the guilty band with fear,
And speak pursuit?—Haste, friends, along,
To rescue speed, ye gallant throng !—

Urge every nerve—or chase is vain!—
For lo! the dastard ruffians gain
Yon towering pass;—that ghaut once cleared,
Thy brave pursuit were little feared.
The morning breaks,—see—see, above,
On fearful height the horsemen move!
And now—they urge the litter on;
Haste, or the fatal pass is won!
Blest Heav'n!—thy angels throw the die!
Of rescue, or captivity;
Of weal, or woe, to Veteran brave,
Who speeds a daughter's hope to save—
“And oh! Thy awful will be done!”
The Veteran cried in frenzied tone:
But as he spake, the die was cast,
And rescue vain—the ghaut they passed!

With joy of guilty triumph fraught,
The Hindus reached that fearful ghaut;
Already had they passed the brink
Of depths, that made ev'n valour shrink;
One tall rough cliff alone remains,
And seek they then the safer plains.
But high that precipice in air,
And dread the dizzy pathway there;

So narrow,—scarce could footmen twain,
Their oft terrific course maintain;
So loose the soil, with flint and stone,
And weed, and moss, the path o'ergrown,
That death to him whose giddy sight
Palzied his feet upon that height:
One faltering step,—and fate was nigh,
In depth of dark eternity!

Among the treacherous flying crew,
One horseman ill could bear the view
Of such abyss,—wide, dark, and deep,—
That yawning flanked the giddy steep:
And ill his trembling hand could guide,
His steed along its crumbling side.
Thrice had his terrors called for aid,
Thrice had his fears the band delayed:—
They cursed him:—as their curses pealed,
Floundered his horse,—it stumbled,—reeled;—
Floundered again;—'twas Soopol then,
Whose wild shrieks pierced the echoing glen!
Around his courser's neck he clings,—
The frightened beast but wilder flings:
Already on the yielding brink,
Its feet wide faltering--failing—sink!

'Tis o'er!—'tis o'er!—deep hurled beneath,
The steed and horseman plunge to death!

Paused the pale band;—each ear intent,
Caught horror-struck the long descent!
They shuddering heard the first fell shock,
Re-echoing from the midway rock;
The rushing next 'mid leaf and bough,
As crashingly they bent below—
'Till pealing hollow from the dell,
Came the last crash, in fearful knell;—
And all was still!—The ruffians shrink
In speechless horror from the brink;
Yet listen on,—and think is heard
A low—faint moan,—a murmured word.
'Tis fancy all:—within that deep,
Death sleeps a sighless, moanless sleep.
And Oh! if aught the brain could rive,
Or harrowed thoughts to madness drive,
It were to view that sunken bed,
Where Soopol and his steed lay dead;
Where flesh deep torn, and gaping wound,
And limbs all shapeless, strewed the ground—
With eyeless sockets—features blent
In one red ruin, gashed and rent—

Till scarce the wild beast prowling near,
That, startling, eyed the fallen cheer,
Amid the mangled heap could scan,
The relics of his foeman—Man!



HERA.



CANTO FIFTH.



H E E R A.



CANTO FIFTH.

'Tis sad to think of joy once known,
And feel that joy for ever flown ;
To weep at life's young day-dream past,
And sigh for spring that may not last.
'Tis sad to view, at morning hour,
The gloomy sign of tempest lower,
And picture then a darksome day,
Uncheered by one short sunny ray.
'Tis sad to part from dearest friend,
From home, and native scene to wend ;—
But ah, 'tis sadder—sadder far,
'To know the bosom's wilder war,
When those whom once we dearly loved,
Unworthy of the heart have proved ;
And reason bids us burst the tie,
Which linked that love unworthily.

For dawn o'ercast may brighten still,
And joy may bud from present ill ;
Fond hope can gild the exile's day,
And Fancy paint each scene away ;
The long lost friend we yet may strain
To beating breast of love again :—
But what shall calm the widowed heart,
That, doomed from fairest dream to part,
Awakes and finds the vision rent,
Which seemed with life so closely blent ;
That like the spot, where rifted trees
Lie blasted in the tempest's breeze,
Ere every root can quit the ground,
The soil but wears one frightful wound !—
The ivy clings upon the tower,
Its tendrils wreath around the bower ;
Firm, to the wave-encircled rock,
The sea-weeds cling, and well they mock
The dashing of the angry surge,
Tho' ceaseless gales their fury urge :—
But, tear these from the rock's support,
They scatter wide,—the billow's sport ;
And ivy, snatched from parent bower,
Withers in lone deserted hour !

Old Beejanuggur's gates arise,
To greet the wearied horsemen's eyes;
And now they hasten o'er the plain,
The rampart's towering side to gain:
Welcome to them, as Mecca's height,
That greets the way-worn Moslem's sight.
Hark, from the curtained litter come,
Faint cries of one who weeps her doom;
And deep her bosom heaves the sigh
At late detected villainy
Of him, whom once she dearly loved,
And whom as parent she approved.
She weeps—yet knows not half the crime,
That tore her from her native clime;
She knows not,—Soopol's deadly art
Had plotted ev'n a double part:—
To vengeance him for the hateful blow,
From Ahmed,—rash mysterious foe;—
The other thought—far blacker still,
Replete with hell-imagined ill,
To force the lovely virgin maid,
To haughty Dewul's haram shade;
Still hoping, in reward for sin,
That he the Rajah's smile might win,

And favored rise to wealth and fame,
By aiding deed of guilt and shame !
But, blest,—thrice blest,—the fatal dell,
Where, hurled to death, he plunging fell ;
And thus may ever vengeful fate,
The daring path of sin await !—

The Hindus now have sought the gate,
Nor long at barrier-portal wait ;
A messenger swift onward hies,
To tell the Roy of captured prize.
But fiercest ire the chief assailed,
When learned he, that in part had failed
His daring plot : and scarce he deigned
To think of her his slaves had gained :
And like the falcon in its flight,
That fails—and proudly spurns the sight
Of meaner prey,—nor deigns to eye
The readier victim crouching nigh,—
“ To western tower the girl convey,”
He said, and turned in scorn away !
His heart was baffled in its hate,
He listened not to Soopol’s fate ;
But sullen cursed the trembling band,
Who captured not, with surer hand,

The lover-foe :—'twas strange, in sooth,
Why fired his vengeance 'gainst that youth ;
Yet such it was,—and vain to pry,
Or solve that thing of mystery !

To western tower of gloom conveyed,
They leave the lovely weeping maid :
In vain her tears ;—a haggard guard
Of ancient females throng the ward.
No pitying glance their looks afford,
Nor breathe they one consoling word :
Steril silence chills the fated prey,
Or scorn derides her wan dismay.
Pale Heera shudders at the gloom,
Deep mantling o'er her prison-room ;
Where narrow lattice, glimmering high,
Gives horror to the shrinking eye ;—
Casements, where bar and massy frame,
The hopelessness of flight proclaim ;
And ponderous door, and towering wall,
With boding thought the soul appal !

The night came sad ; the captive heard
The warder's oft repeated word ;

She marked along the rampart wall
The sentry's ceaseless footstep fall :
Each midnight sound that struck the ear,
Came to the heart in chill of fear ;—
She pondered on her prisoned fate,
Snatched from a home, where joyous state
Of love, and young affection shone—
Remembered—but to weep them gone !—
She pondered, till her feverish brain,
O'erpower'd by keenest sense of pain,
Failed her ; and from the couch she fled,
'Mid frenzied laugh—then shriek of dread ;—
Till scarce the watchful females near,
Could still the death-like burst of fear !
Anon, she bent a lowly knee,—
She breathed a prayer in agony
To heartless wretches, who around
But scoffed the prayer's low suppliant sound.—
Though by the lamp that flung its light
Along the flickering gloom of night,
Such angel features met their view,
More beauteous ev'n in terror's hue,
That had one spark of pity shone
On hearts less hard than flinty stone,

Those women-fiends had wept at sight,
Of beauty, in its sorrow bright ;—
Of tresses, streaming in the air ;
Of glances, wild with mariac glare ;
And sighs from throbbing bosom waking,—
Throbbing as though that heart was breaking!

The sun at early morn arose,
And day appeared to mock her woes ;
Its light, which thro' the lattice sped,
Still saw the maid on sleepless bed,
In that wild listlessness of grief,
When sorrow, reckless of relief,
Rests a dim—vacant—glassy eye
On aught—yet notes no object nigh.
And many a day all cheerless sped,
Yet passed no change o'er Heera's head ;
But when another moon had dyed,
With infant ray, the turret's side ;
They decked the unresisting maid
In gorgeous dress :—a veil arrayed,
Her lovely form of gentle fear ;
And fading tho' her charms appear,
Still there was left of loveliness,
Enough the gazing eye to bless ;

Enough the victim to declare,
The fairest of the Dekhan's fair.

And scarce the Evening watch was placed,
And sentinels the rampart paced ;
Or round the lonely fosse and wall,
The wild beasts urged their nightly call ;
Scarce had the starry host on high,
Shed their mild lustre o'er the sky ;—
Ere Dewul gained the haram's porch,
Preceded by a flaming torch.
Silent he stalked thro' winding way,
That led him to his trembling prey :—
The bolts withdrew—each heavy bar
Released its hold 'mid creak and jar,
And stern to Heera stood confest
The Rajah of the guilty breast !

One look she gave ;—then turned aside,
And shrunk beneath his scowl of pride :
Enough the look,—that haughty scowl,
Was glance of death to Heera's soul ;—
It told her all that fear could paint,
To make the sickening fancy faint ;—
And pictured well a ruffian's hate,
In triumph of its sin elate !—

To near attendant's arm she clung,
Her veil around her wildly flung ;
And gasped, as tho' her breath had failed,
In terror, which the heart assailed.—
“ Poor fool ! ”—th' unpitying chieftain cried,
“ Thou shrink'st at Dewul by thy side ;
“ Not thus, in sooth, thine idle fear,
“ If haply were thy Lover near :
“ And yet,—methinks—if such his fate,
“ Thou'd'st shrink still more at Dewul's hate !
“ Aye,—curses on my craven band,
“ Who seized thee forth, at my command ;
“ Yet failed to bring thy paramour,
“ To meet my wrath,—in this thy bower !—
“ Maid ! had my plotted will been done,
“ Another Sire had mourned a Son ;
“ Another Parent felt the throe
“ Of blasted hopes,—of childless woe ! ”

He seized her hand, which grasped the veil,
And strove to hide each feature pale.
“ Poor fool ! ”—again thy Rajah said,
“ Thou lik'st not thought of lover dead ;
“ Thou could'st not view thy stripling slain,
“ Nor see red blood his bosom stain :—

“ Nay, shriek not !—I have seen life’s blood
“ Burst from the heart in eddying flood,
“ From youth, as dear, as fond as thine,
“ And one as loved by me and mine !—
“ Yes,—yes,—these eyes such scene have viewed—
“ One murdered youth, with wounds imbrued;
“ And they had marked another still,
“ Had recreant minions blessed my will.
“ Slave ! give to view thy syren face,
“ Which lured a scion of that race,
“ So hated, that ev’n hell were heav’n,
“ Compared to torture I had given,
“ To son detested of a sire,
“ Whose very name is scourge of ire.”

He grasped the maid with arm of strength—
He held her at that arm’s stern length—
And gazed terrific.—Every charm
Was heightened by the maid’s alarm ;—
The veil had fallen to the ground,
Her hair was floating loose around,
Her lips—those lips of seraph love—
In vain a prayer for mercy strove ;
While looks of terror, from aside,
The monster’s fiend-like features eyed !—

“ Yes, thou art fair ; ” — he said — “ but go,
“ I am not youthful lover now : —
“ And mark me — minion — if I spare, —
“ Not pity bids my soul forbear. ” —
He turned, and loosed his iron grasp : —
The maiden gave one fearful gasp ;
Like one, whose spirit seemed to fly,
O’ercome by lengthen’d agony ; —
And instant to the earth she fell,
Nor viewed the tyrant quit the cell !

How sad the night’s long moments fly,
In gloom of dread captivity ;
And yet those hours are doubly drear,
When linked to boding sense of fear.
The prisoner chained to dungeon wall,
Tho’ circling darkness may appal ;
Tho’ every clank of heavy chain,
Recal the busy dream of pain ;
If yet his fate hath reached its worst,
And knows he, that these bonds accurst
Are all his misery hath to dread —
Such wretch to rest may sooth his head. —
Not so, the peaceless captive’s hour,
On whom new fears unceasing pour ;

Who wails alike the present doom,
And shrinks at pictured ills to come.
Shall such a victim sink to rest,
Whilst brooding horrors haunt the breast,
And agony of dread suspense
But conjures pain to every sense?

But if such victim's fate unblest,
Can gain no soothing hour of rest;
If peaceful slumbers ever fly,
Nor close the wearied aching eye;—
Yet Heera, thou might'st bless thy night,
Tho' lingering thus in chill affright,
If thou hadst marked the torments keen,
Shedding their misery o'er the scene
Of Dewul, on his bed of crime,
Where guilty horror sat sublime!
It were a fearful sight to view,
His writhing features' livid hue;
Where sleep, if sleep it can be thought,
But shrouded thus,—unwished—unsought;
While conscience urged its busy scourge,
Or seemed its fetter bands to forge,
'Mid wild anticipating yell,
To doom his soul to living hell!

His haggard eye was half unclosed,
Its rayless orb to view exposed :
The sweat was studded o'er his brow ;
His cheek now flushed with hectic glow,—
Or sudden changed to ghastly pale,
As varied dreams of guilt assail :—
He starts.—He summons round each slave ;
Alone the night he dare not brave.

And scarce the morrow beamed again,
Ere messengers, from distant plain,
Had brought report to Dewul's ear,
And told of foemen gathering near.
They said, throughout the Sooltan's land,
Assembling was each warrior-band ;
And many a Moslem chieftain seen,
Who waved on high his pennon green.
Again Feroze had sounded far,
The clang of fierce invading war ;
And sworn his standard now should float,
O'er vanquished Beejanuggur's moat.
The spies affirmed, that busy fame,
Declared aloud the gallant name,
Of Hussein Khan, the Sooltan's son,
Whose brand in battle oft had shone,

And spread his youthful glory wide,
Till stood he forth the Dekhan's pride,—
Now called the Moslem force to lead,
And fire their souls to vengeance dread.

But Dewul shrunk not at the news,
His cheek ev'n flushed! with prouder hues;
And fiercer shone his angry glance,
As said he, " Bid the prince advance:—
" Perhaps my arm and readier steel,
" In rest those youthful lids may seal,
" Ere yet his Sire shall mark my fall,
" Or floats his banner o'er my wall!—
" Ho! speed vakeels to every friend!
" Bid them with gathered force attend!
" 'Tis now the hour for Hindu might
" To crush the Paynim in the fight,
" And give our Brahma's power again
" In triumph o'er the Dekhan's plain!"—
He paused awhile—and lower said,
" And come they for the captive maid?—
" Aye, let them; but no living charms
" Shall bless, I ween, a lover's arms!"—
He ceased, and gave a demon smile,
Dread emblem of his inward guile;

And courtiers' glances wondering met,
As caught their ear the muttered threat.

Oft Dewul sought the rampart's height,
And all prepared for deadliest fight ;
Resolved within his native wall,
To brave the siege, or proudly fall.
He hoped, that if by blest delay,
The Sooltan's arms he once might stay ;
Soon would each warlike Hindu clan
Be marshalled 'gainst the Mussulmaun,
And gaining whelming strength in time,
Regain for ay the conquered clime.
Fresh spies arrive,—and still they tell,
Of war's loud clang, and busy swell,
Re-echoing ev'n to Kistna's banks,
Where lengthening armies stretched their flanks.
While from the Rajah's fiefs around,
With hopes of valiant triumph crowned,
Come Hindu warriors breathing woe,
And death to Maha Dewul's foe ;
Till tented 'neath each battlement,
They wait the siege, on fight intent.

'Tis now lone midnight's darkest tide,
 Nor beams the moon on rampart's side:
 The Hindu hosts are sunk in sleep,
 Save such as weary watches keep.—
 Why wanders Dewul's step of dread?
 Why speeds he thus in silent tread?
 And wherefore at this lonely hour,
 Seeks he the path to western tower?—
 But list!—quick sounds arrest his feet,
 And backward now his steps retreat.
 A band of slaves with lights appear,
 And seek their Lord in trembling fear.
 “Why come ye hither?—Quick disclose!”—
 “Thy slaves thine hour of wont repose
 “Disturb, to tell of horsemen brave,
 “Some hundred friends, who earnest crave,
 “Admittance at thy city gate,
 “And humbly there thy mandate wait.
 The Rajah mused:—“This hour of night—
 “Who are they?—Bid the band alight,
 “And pause 'till morrow beams to sight.”—
 “Not so, dread Liege; from fair Berar,
 “These Hindu friends have journeyed far,
 “To league in thy triumphant cause,
 “And war for sacred Brahma's laws:

“ Weary, and shelterless, they call
“ For entrance at the eastern wall.”—
“ Hence, and admit them,—nor delay!”—
The Rajah said—then turned away,
To seek again in darkest night
The gloomy western turret’s height.

Black are the thoughts that now employ
The fiendish soul of Dewul Roy;
Dire are the workings of his breast,
And ah!—a tulwar ’neath his vest!
What means he?—Durst his coward hand,
Strike to a virgin heart that brand?
Blest Ulla! if thy wakeful power,
Shield innocence, in threatened hour;
If from thy starry seat on high,
Thou hear’st the prisoned victim’s sigh;—
If guileless love, with plighted truth,
Of gentle maid, and gallant youth,
Find mercy—favour at thy throne,
Bid thy avenging bolt be thrown
To blast the murderer—for his blade
Thirsts for the blood of captive maid!

He gains the tower.—Blest Heaven! his feet,
In sudden step, again retreat—

Sure pity cannot now controul,
The ruffian purpose of his soul :
Why turns he?—ha ! he hears a shout
Of mingled terror from without ;
While gathering peals the loud alarm
Of distant fray and contest warm !
He rushes back,—he meets his guard,
Who hastening seek the turret ward,
And shout of treachery !—Short their tale ;
They say that daring foemen scale
The palace walls ;—that treacherous band
Admitted by the Roy's command,
Fertile in wile of Moslem hate,
As Hindus clad had passed the gate ;
And crowding on in maddest fight,
Had stormed the inner haram's height.—
“ Rouse every guard ! ”—the Rajah cried,
And rushed he forth with frantic stride ;
Enraged, confounded at the din
That stayed his murderous work of sin !

The wall is scaled :—full many a form
Of Moslem warrior seeks the storm
Of closer fight ;—and deals around
The blow that strews the foeman's ground.

Amid the host a gallant youth
Fights well beneath his guise uncouth;
And the' his wily Hindu dress,
Can nought of rank or worth express,
Yet there are glances from his eye,
That speak his proud nobility.
Loudly for Dewul Roy he calls,
And loud resound the echoing walls;
He bade a follower seize a torch
That glimmered at the haram's porch,
And rushing on with faithful band,
O'erwhelmed the guard on either hand,
Nor paused—till with a rallying few,
Fierce Dewul met his distant view!
“ Ulla ! ”—he cried—“ 'tis he !—accursed !—
“ Come, rebel !—dare my vengeful worst—
“ Advance, thou blasting scourge of man,
“ And face thy Prince, ev'n HUSSEIN KHAN ! ”

Well Dewul heard, but still afar,
Retired from fiercer scene of war;
Bade his stout guards th' assailants stay,
And fled for once the fight's array !
'Twas not in fear :—a murderer's brand,
Again he grasps in guilty hand.

But, fly his guards ;—and at his heel
Speeds the bold prince with lifted steel ;
And soon the glaring torch's light,
Reveals the Rajah's savage flight.
The prison door he breathless gains,
The gallant youth still swifter strains :—
The Roy is seized—a well-aimed blow
But waits to strike the tyrant low !—
“ Turn coward, turn ! ”—the Moslem cried,
“ Not thus my nobler steel be dyed ;
“ Turn fiend—and face thy sovereign's son,
“ Who tells—thy hated course is run ! ”

Fierce turned the Roy,—and guilt and ire
Flashed from his eye a look of fire.
He muttered,—“ Ha !—my sovereign's son,
“ Well hast thou said,—rash boy, come on ! ”
Nor shrunk he now :—a fearful blow
He levelled at his youthful foe ;
It bloodless fell,—another came,
But well was warded every aim.
Wily, at length,—he slow recedes,
As if to nerve for deadlier deeds.
Each, breathless, marks the other's eye,
And waits to rush, in vengeance, nigh :

While such the contrast then between
The Tyrant's rage—the Youth's bold mien;
It seemed to mortal view was given,
A fiend that warred with form of heaven!
Uplifted gleamed th' impatient brand
Half quivering in each eager hand,
As tho' the very steel had life,
And panted, trembling, for the strife!
They meet!—the readier arm of youth
Hath dealt its blow with errless truth;
For Dewul staggers!—Ha! again,
He fiercer strikes in maddening pain;
And loud the clash;—while, from within
Yon prison, screams but swell the din.—
The door is forced,—each female slave
Shrieks as the twain the combat brave.
See—from the portal, wild with fear,
A frantic maiden rushes near,
And fain would fly their swords between.—
But, ere she reached the mortal scene,
A direr blow had felled the Roy,
Who sunk before the warrior boy!—
Upraised one demon glance of hate,
To curse the hand that sealed his fate;

And soon the secret fault forgave,
That won the love of Hussein brave !
Or what Feroze's looks confess,
When struck with Houri loveliness,
He blest him that his son should share
The love of one so heavenly fair !—
And blythe was then the marriage feast ;
And Fame flew gaily o'er the East,
And sang in haram, bower, and grove,
Of HUSSEIN KHAN'S and HEERA'S love !

FINIS.





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